



## Western State Hospital Graves

04/19/2009

Thirty graves at Western State Hospital in Steilacoom will be replaced today (Saturday). Until now, they've been marked only with numbers. But today they'll get gravestones with names of the deceased.

Patients who died at Western State Hospital were buried there from 1876 to 1953. The hospital cared for the mentally ill. Stigma against mental illness was so powerful, state law kept the names of patients secret. So each gravestone was basically:

Quackenbush: "A brick with a number on it."

That's Vicky Quackenbush of SeaTac. Her great-great grandmother had one of those bricks. When Vicky was a kid, all she knew was that her great-great grandmother had died when Vicky's grandfather was just a little kid. She found out more when she did some genealogy research.

Quackenbush: "She had a mental breakdown. It said in the court records that she was suicidal."

Something we'd probably call post-partum depression today. Vicky's great-great grandmother, Teresa Finkas, was sent to Western State, and died of pneumonia. Vicky says her family re-did her great-great grandmother's gravestone about five years ago. That's when the law changed to allow the names to be public.

Quackenbush: "I'm just so happy that they've finally been able to release those names and put proper markers on the graves. It means a lot."

A volunteer group uses grant money, donations from families and a discount with a headstone company to re-do the graves.

The group has replaced 120 markers. Over 3200 patients are buried there.

Phyllis Fletcher, KUOW News.

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